

Today in World Affairs

On Russian Arms in Cuba
And the Alarmed Senators

By David Lawrence

WASHINGTON

The greatest danger to the security of the United States today is in Cuba. There is enough Soviet military strength remaining on the island to launch an attack on this country.

Yet the American people are being led to believe that Soviet military strength in Cuba is negligible and that an attack is as unthinkable as the missile build-up last year was supposed to be.

This was the reasoning used by government agencies here in the autumn of 1962 to minimize the meaning of the Soviet troop movement and of the preliminary steps for the setting up of missile bases.

The most important official document on the Cuban situation has received only passing attention in the last 11 days from the American people. No announcement has been made of what the Kennedy administration intends to do about the facts that have just been disclosed. There are no signs that the Soviet government is being prodded to get its troops, technicians and military equipment out of Cuba, or that any demand is being made to permit on-the-spot inspection in order to find out whether any missiles are still concealed inside the island.

The latest word to the American people about the gravity of the Cuban situation come not from Republican critics trying to make a political issue but from a subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services of the United States Senate headed by a Democratic chairman, Senator John Stennis, of Mississippi. All seven members—four Democrats and three Republicans—signed the unanimous report. It tells the unvarnished truth about what has happened and points out a lesson for the future. Here are some extracts from the report, dated May 9, which was written after hearing for many weeks secret testimony given by the intelligence agencies of the government, civilian and military:

"While a reasonably competent job was done in acquiring and collecting intelligence information and data, in retrospect it appears that several substantial errors were made by the intelligence agencies in the evaluation of the information and data which was accumulated.

'Greatest Urgency'

"Even though the intelligence committee believes that all (strategic missiles) have been withdrawn, it is of the greatest urgency to determine whether or not strategic missiles are now concealed in Cuba. The criticality of this is illustrated by the fact that, assuming maximum readiness at pre-selected sites, with all equipment pre-located, the Soviet mobile medium-range—1,100 miles—missiles could be made operational in a matter of hours. . . .

"Some other sources—primarily refugee and exile groups—estimate that as many as 40,000 Soviets are now in Cuba. Bearing in mind the lack of hard evidence on the question and the substantial underestimation of last fall, we conclude that no one in official United States circles can tell, with any real degree of confidence, how many Russians are now in Cuba and we are of the opinion that the official

17,500 estimate is perhaps a minimum figure. . . .

"The evidence is overwhelming that Castro is supporting, spurring, aiding and abetting Communist revolutionary and subversive movements throughout the Western Hemisphere and that such activities present a grave and ominous threat to the peace and security of the Americas. . . .

"It is agreed that iron-clad assurance of the complete absence of Soviet strategic missiles in Cuba can come only as a result of thorough, penetrating on-site inspection by reliable

"The importance of making every effort to ascertain the truth with respect to this matter cannot be over-emphasized. The criticality of it can best be illustrated by the fact that the testimony established that, upon the assumption that all missiles and associated equipment and the necessary personnel were readily available near preselected sites in a state of complete readiness, mobile medium-range missiles could be made operational in a matter of hours. Thus, if these missiles and their associated equipment remain in Cuba, the danger is clear and obvious. . . .

"Assuming without deciding that all strategic weapons have been withdrawn, there is the ever-present possibility of the stealthy re-introduction of strategic missiles and other offensive weapons, using the Soviet forces still in Cuba as camouflage and security for the activity. . . .

"Potentially, Cuba is a base from which the Soviets could interdict our vital air and sea lanes. It can now be used for the air, sea, and electronic surveillance of our military activities in the southeast United States and the Caribbean.

"Cuba's airfields could serve as recovery air bases for planes launched against the United States from the Soviet Union."

This means that the range of certain Soviet military planes has been increased substantially. They need fly only one way in a surprise attack, drop bombs on the United States and land in Cuba.

Yet in the last few weeks nothing has been done to insist upon on-site inspection in Cuba by the United Nations or by any other agency. The Kennedy Administration has retreated on this point, and only an informal public opinion in the United States kept throughout the world can bring about an advance to verify what has actually happened.

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